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Feb. 21, 2002
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NEWS RELEASE

(Editor's Note: Please embargo this news until Thursday, Feb. 21, which would have been Erma Bombeck's 75th birthday. The site will be live before Feb. 21, but designers are still working on some minor improvements. For interviews or questions about the site, contact Tim Bete at (937) 229-4960.)

HAPPY BIRTHDAY, ERMA! ONLINE MUSEUM SHOWCASES BOMBECK'S LIFE

DAYTON, Ohio — Erma Bombeck made people laugh at their foibles, put words to their lives.

Today, on what would have been her 75th birthday, the University of Dayton shares her gift with the world via the Erma Bombeck Online Museum (<http://www.ErmaMuseum.org>). The museum will be officially launched on Saturday, March 9, at the Erma Bombeck Writers' Workshop at the University of Dayton.

For most of her career, Erma Bombeck wrote using an IBM Selectric typewriter. She liked to see the paper in front of her as she crafted each column. When her son, Matt, tried to get her to use a computer, the printer jammed. "See, I told you so," she said. "These things never work."

While Bombeck avoided using computers, it's computers that are making her life accessible to fans around the world. Two years after the Bombeck family announced that they would donate Erma's papers and artifacts to her alma mater, the University of Dayton is sharing part of the collection via the Internet.

ErmaMuseum.org contains 45 photographs, including Erma at age 9 in a tap-dancing outfit, at a meeting of President Carter's Advisory Council for Women, shopping with Phyllis Diller on Rodeo Drive and talking with Pope John Paul II. Samples of Erma's writing in the museum include the note cards she used to make remarks when she received an honorary degree from UD in 1981, her typewritten remarks from UD's 1982 writers' workshop and eight columns from when she was a student at the University of Dayton. More than 20 audio and video clips reside in the museum. They include Erma describing how UD English professor, Brother Tom Price, S.M., encouraged her to write, and memories shared by Erma's family and friends, such as Phil Donahue, Bil Keane, Mike Peters and Liz Carpenter, among others. There is even an audio clip of Matt Bombeck telling

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the story of how he tried to get his mother to use a computer.

At the heart of the museum are 11 Web pages that chronicle Erma's life. Each page includes excerpts from the biography, *Erma Bombeck: Writer and Humorist*, written by Lynn Hutner Colwell. The book, published in 1992 by Enslow Publishers, is currently out of print. Colwell, who will attend the official launching on March 9, donated the excerpts to the museum project.

"Erma only agreed to be interviewed because the book was for young people," said Colwell, in a phone interview from Post Falls, Idaho. "She wasn't interested in having her biography written."

Colwell, who had never written a book before, spent seven hours interviewing Bombeck.

"I was a nervous wreck," said Colwell. "We formed an instant connection. Erma made me a ham sandwich. We laughed like old friends. I'll always remember that wonderful day."

Excerpts from the book will now have a larger audience than the libraries and schools to which the book was originally sold as part of a Contemporary Women Series.

"I'm very, very excited about the online museum," said Colwell. "What Erma said is timeless. It will be valuable for people to be able to rediscover her."

For three decades, Bombeck celebrated the extraordinary in the ordinary and chronicled life's absurdities in a syndicated column carried by 700 newspapers prior to her death of kidney disease in 1996. She credited the University of Dayton with preparing her for life and work, for making her believe she could write. She graduated in 1949 with a degree in English and never forgot that she got encouragement as a writer at the University of Dayton.

Bombeck gave back to the University in numerous ways. She served on the board of trustees from 1984 to 1987; co-chaired with her husband the National Alumni Challenge Campaign during the University's capital campaign in the 1980s; spoke at events on campus, including a writers' workshop; and participated in advertising and direct-mail campaigns to help broaden the University's image and recruit students. In 1981, she received an honorary doctorate from UD, and she was named an honorary trustee in 1988.

The online museum, funded with a grant from the University's National Alumni Association, was created by the UD Research Institute Web Development Center in conjunction with the office of public relations and the UD archives collection. ErmaMuseum.org is one gallery in the Plethoreum (www.plethoreum.org), a collection of online exhibits created by the Web Development Center. The full collection will be available for viewing once the University of Dayton receives and catalogues all the material.

To visit the museum, go to www.ErmaMuseum.org. The museum never closes.

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For media interviews about ErmaMuseum.org or to arrange an interview with **Lynn Hutner Colwell**, call **Tim Bete** at (937) 229-4960 or e-mail bete@udayton.edu.